

For: State and County Offices

2003 COC Election Outreach and Nomination

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Field Operations



1 Overview

A Background

The Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (the Act) requires the Secretary to solicit and accept nominations for FSA COC member positions from organizations representing the interests of socially disadvantaged groups.

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 requires the Secretary to prepare a report and make available to the public the participation rate of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers according to race, ethnicity, and gender.

A report by the Civil Rights Action Team concluded that under-representation of minorities and females on COC's may prevent disadvantaged producers from receiving information about program and available services.

B Definition of Socially Disadvantaged Group

Socially disadvantaged group means a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities.

C Socially Disadvantaged Group Representation on COC's

To ensure representation of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers on COC's, FSA requires County Offices to do the following:

- actively solicit and accept nominations from socially disadvantaged groups of agricultural producers in the county or area
- actively advertise the opportunity to nominate during the nomination period
- place informational poster in public facilities.

Disposal Date

June 1, 2004

Distribution

State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

D Publicizing Elections

FSA shall continue to publicize and contact socially disadvantaged groups to:

- nominate eligible candidates to represent the group
- ensure that all producers are adequately and timely informed about COC elections and procedures. County Offices and COC's shall begin outreach activities immediately.

E Purpose

This notice instructs STC's and COC's to:

- begin accepting nominations for the 2003 COC election
- actively seek socially disadvantaged nominees
- make COC election information available to local producers using all means possible to include, but not limited to, FSA county or area newsletters, local and minority-oriented newspapers, radio, and television stations, if available
- be informed of changes in 2003 for the slate of nominees.

Note: See paragraph 3 for the 2003 election calendar.

2 Action

A SED and STC Action

SED's and STC's shall be responsible for contacting State and local offices of socially disadvantaged groups.

Note: SED's shall coordinate this effort when State-level offices involve more than 1 State.

SED's shall:

- take an active role in contacting socially disadvantaged group leaders
- ensure that representatives fully understand the responsibilities of COC's and the COC election process
- ensure cooperation and assistance from County Offices at the local level.

2 Action (Continued)

A SED and STC Action (Continued)

SED, in consultation with the State Offices Outreach Coordinator or designee shall require each COC to develop and submit to SED **by July 31, 2003**, a plan to ensure that all producers are adequately informed of the COC election. The plan shall include methods for targeting the socially disadvantaged groups.

New ballots will be mailed out to the eligible voters beginning November 18, 2003. County Offices shall prepare a supply of manually created ballots to provide to anyone not on a mailing list. County Offices shall also prepare a supply of pre-addressed return envelopes bearing the mailing address of the voting site.

B COC Action

COC's shall immediately develop a plan to inform all producers concerning the:

- COC election processes
- specific actions that the County Office will take to ensure that:
 - each minority, female, and other under-represented group is contacted and informed of the election process
 - nomination forms and assistance are available for all producers.

It is critical to FSA's future that employees ensure that all producers have an equal opportunity to be a candidate for COC. COC's shall inform employees to:

- listen to producers' concerns and suggestions
- explain FSA programs and missions
- develop good working relationships with all producers.

Nomination of eligible producers is the primary method used to obtain candidates for COC elections. COC's are responsible for ensuring that all producers are knowledgeable about the selection of nominees for COC positions.

For 2003 COC elections, there is no required minimum number of eligible nominees for COC slate, unless no FSA-669A's are received for the Local Administrative Areas (LAA's) conducting an election. COC's are required to complete a slate of nominees only if no nominations are received.

If no nominations are received, COC's shall nominate **at least 3** candidates to complete the slate. Where it has been determined that socially disadvantaged groups are not adequately represented, COC's shall add nominees who can fairly represent the interest of these groups. COC's must verify that each individual nominated by COC to fill a slate is willing to serve and meets all eligible requirements.

Note: Begin to accept nomination forms upon receipt of this notice.

2 Action (Continued)

C CED Action

CED's shall:

- take an active role in contacting leaders of underrepresented groups to solicit nominations
- ensure that these groups fully understand the role of COC
- be available to meet with socially disadvantaged groups to fully explain the election procedures
- locally reproduce the nomination forms, fact sheets, and posters from the FSA internet at **<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/pubfacts.htm>** and post them in public locations.

D Contact

If there are questions about this notice, contact Ken Nagel at any of the following:

- telephone: 202-720-7890
- FAX: 202-690-3309
- e-mail: **Ken_Nagel @wdc.usda.gov**

Notice AO-1283

3 2003 COC Election Calendar

A Deadlines for COC Election

The following table provides dates that shall be followed for the 2003 election.

Date	Activity
May 23, 2003	Complete COC review of LAA boundaries and send changes to STC. Note: COC shall document in the minutes the review and determinations concerning LAA boundaries.
June 30, 2003	Complete STC review of COC LAA boundary changes and approve. Note: STC shall document in the minutes the review and determinations concerning LAA boundaries
July 15, 2003	County Offices complete LAA changes in the system.
On-going	County Offices begin outreach activities, add eligible voters to the county name and address file, and publicize the nomination process.
August 1, 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete eligible voters list.• Issue public notice of election and LAA boundaries.• Right to nominate candidates. Begin accepting nomination forms.
September 5, 2003	Final date to receive nomination forms.
September 12, 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review nominations.• Complete slates of nominees.• Final date for mailing letter to nominees.
September 15, 2003	Upload ballot data to KC.
September 26, 2003	Consolidate ballot data to contractor.
November 18, 2003	Final date for contractor to mail ballots.
November 24, 2003	Suggested date to mail reminder postal cards.
December 1, 2003	Final date for returning completed ballots.
December 8, 2003	Final date for counting ballots.
December 22, 2003	Final date for State Office to transmit data to KC.
February 1, 2004	KC-ITSDO to send final report to DAFO.
March 1, 2004	DAFO to present report to Secretary.